

Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education (ACPE)

Strategic Plan 2022-2026

Revised August 2020

Mission Statement:

To expand access and increase success in postsecondary education for Arizonans.

Agency Description:

The Commission comprises 16 Commissioners, fourteen of whom are Governor appointed. Commissioners represent both public and private postsecondary education and its constituencies. Core responsibilities of the ACPE are related to student financial assistance programs including administration of state grants, scholarships, and forgivable loans.

In addition, A.R.S. Title 15, Chapter 14, Article 5, § 15-1851 B1a charges the Commission to focus on the postsecondary needs of the unserved and underserved individuals in Arizona. It is this call to equity that caused the Commission to develop, implement, and build the College and Career Goal Arizona programs, which are designed to support Arizona's high schools. Additionally, these programs assist low-income students and their families plan, transition, and succeed in postsecondary education and the workforce.

Moreover, the Commission has spawned interest and participation from all sectors of postsecondary education to join together to find sustainable solutions to erase the well-documented education and career achievement gap for low-income students and their families. This persistent gap is seen in the educational performance of low-income and minority students in comparison to other groups. This educational gap drives the limited participation in workforce success, as well. The elimination of this gap will propel Arizona forward with the engine of an ever-growing K-12 student talent pool ready to take on the projected 61% of jobs requiring a postsecondary credential or degree in the next decade.

Strategic Issue 1: Student financial assistance dollars have been reduced and the scarcity of funding is impeding access and completion of postsecondary education for Arizonans.

Arizona's postsecondary students have been highly impacted since the great recession by a reduction in state student aid and the loss of all federal student aid passing through the state. Unfortunately, the Private Postsecondary Education Student Assistance Pro-

gram was terminated in 2017. The Early Graduation Scholarship Grant was repealed in the 51st Special Legislative Session in 2014. The U.S. DOE's denial of Arizona's College Access Challenge Grant Maintenance of Effort Waiver request, the termination of federal LEAP and Special LEAP funding, along with a lack of funding for the recently amended 2017 Private Postsecondary Education Grant, all demonstrate the great need for increased financial aid program funding.

As the state's representative to the National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs, Commission staff recognize many states have experienced reductions, but few lost over 60% as experienced in Arizona. In FY 2018, \$2.6M represented flow-through funds dedicated to student grants and scholarships. As compared to FY 2008 when the student financial assistance dollars were \$7.5M. All Arizona students miss these financial aid dollars. The Commission staff members are dedicated to making sure each remaining dollar of student aid is available in a timely manner and that existing financial aid programs are well administered.

An important response of the Commission to the meager levels of state and federal student aid has been to heighten efforts to raise the awareness and participation in the Arizona Family College Savings (529) Program (AFCSP). This state-sponsored program provides investments where earnings grow tax-deferred and distributions are tax-free when used for qualified college expenses. Moreover, Arizona provides a state income tax deduction for 529 plan contributions of up to \$2,000 for individual tax filers and up to \$4,000 for married couples filing jointly. The AFCSP provides a great opportunity for families to prepare for college expenses and today holds \$1.3B in assets under management. The following strategies under Goal 1 are designed to address the loss of financial aid for Arizona students.

Goal 1: Maximize student financial assistance available and support efforts to restore and increase student aid.

Strategy 1.1: Provide effective and efficient administration of the Arizona Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership (AzLEAP).

1. Maintain administration similar to state and federal guidelines to provide consistency for both institutions and students.
2. Survey postsecondary institutions regarding effectiveness of administration.
3. Annually assess opportunities for continuous improvement of administrative processes.
4. Develop, test, and implement streamlined processes, as needed.
5. Develop and implement new AzLEAP procedures for auditing participating postsecondary institutions to ensure program compliance.

6. Prepare and distribute reports on students served by program to policy makers.

Performance Measures:

- Achieve 90% satisfaction with administration of program as evaluated by institutional constituencies annually.
- Document annually any opportunities for continuous improvement.
- Document the process improvements implemented, including the new audit, and describe administrative benefits.
- Complete and distribute an annual report to policy leaders informing them about participants and the benefits to the State.

Strategy 1.2: Ensure that the Arizona Teacher Student Loan Program, (formerly known as the Arizona Math, Science, Special Education Teacher Loan Forgiveness program or MSSE) is bringing about equity by attracting individuals into teaching preparation programs and alternative teaching certificate programs who will take on a mission of service in order to repay their loans in one of four ways: by teaching at a low-income school (60% Free and Reduced Lunch schools); by teaching math, science, or special education; by teaching in a rural school; or by teaching in a school located on an Indian Reservation.

1. Increase and improve the promotion of the Arizona Teacher Student Loan Program to better meet the State's needs for equity and elimination of the achievement gap for Arizona's low-income and minority children.
2. Seek to increase the appropriated funds for this program by \$250,000 in order to begin to increase the teacher pipeline for math, science, special education subjects, for low-income, rural, and schools on tribal lands. This will secure an additional 30-40 individuals per year committed to teacher service in Arizona.
3. Identify ways to recruit and financially support individuals who are seeking teacher certification and are motivated, and will take steps in the school and the classroom to close the achievement gap for low-income and minority K-12 students.
4. Integrate the Arizona Teacher Student Loan Program (ATSLP) into the AzGrants website providing a simple application for student aid.
5. Market and promote to all Arizona students already enrolled in public and private teacher education programs for maximum exposure of these opportunities to eligible students.

6. Prepare an annual report describing student and institutional participants as well as teacher retention, loan forgiveness, and loan repayments.

Performance Measures:

- ATSLP represents a cohesive forgivable loan program with achievable and measurable goals.
- Application process is simple for students and integrated into the AzGrants web portal to enable students to apply quickly and easily.
- Students apply, colleges certify eligibility, and funds are received in a timely manner contributing to the success of the program and its goals.
- Adequate numbers of eligible students apply and receive funds.
- An annual report to policy leaders is compiled and distributed including data regarding pre-service student participation, institutions participating, data on teacher service in shortage areas, and teacher retention data.

Strategy 1.3: Ensure the sustainability of the AzGrants.az.gov website and a secure web portal which supports access to state student grants, scholarships, forgivable loans, and additionally serves as the web portal for the exchange of sensitive data and reports with high schools for FAFSA Finish Line, College Application Campaign, and College Goal FAFSA Student Progress Reports.

1. Maintain AZGrants.az.gov, a public facing website providing links to financial aid options and resources.
2. Maintain a single secure web portal which accepts state student aid applications and is programmed to complete the back end administrative processes necessary to award student financial aid.
3. Portal provides high school staff and designated entities secure access to Student Progress Reports and individual FAFSA completion status data.
4. Portal provides financial aid professionals from postsecondary institutions across the state secure and user-friendly access for verification and certification of student eligibility for state financial aid.
5. Portal allows students to track the progress of their application.
6. Data is collected through the website regarding students and institutions to be used for reports and making data-rich policy decisions.

Performance Measures:

- Number of grants, scholarships, and loans issued annually.
- Number of reports with sensitive data transferred in a secure manner e.g. individual FAFSA Finish Line reports and Student Progress Reports.
- Website allows the Commission to support high schools with up to the minute data on FAFSA status reports enabling high school staff to target needs and aid the students in the completion of their application.
- Assessment of enhanced security provided through the portal.
- Allows compilation of annual reports for policy leaders describing characteristics of students, the institutions participating, as well as data from students regarding barriers and incentives to persistence to degree.

Administration of the Arizona Family College Savings Program, established in 1997, is being transferred to the State Treasurer on September 30, 2020.

Strategic Issue 2: Forty-eight percent of Arizona K-12 students live at 200% of poverty or below and these students and families will benefit from information and support to take the necessary steps to enroll, finance, and complete a postsecondary education.

As compared to other states across the nation Arizona has:

- (1) one of the lowest college-going rates with only 52.6% of the 2017 seniors enrolling in a postsecondary education experience leaving 33,812 students with no further education options, likewise
- (2) one of the lowest college attainment rates with only 27.3% of a senior class (2011) graduating from a 2-year or 4-year postsecondary institution 6 years following high school graduation; and only
- (3) 44% of Arizonans complete some form of postsecondary education.

These outcomes coexist with the prediction from Anthony Carnevale's "*Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Educational Requirements through 2018*" published by Georgetown Public Policy Institute's Center on Education and the Workforce that three out of five jobs in Arizona, or 61%, will require some training beyond high school by 2018. No longer is high school graduation the finish line. Arizona must improve the edu-

cation outcomes of our K-12 and postsecondary education systems in order to meet projected workforce and social capital needs.

College and Career Goal Arizona (C2GA) is a statewide initiative coordinated by the Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education. It promotes partnerships with Title 1 high schools and postsecondary institutions statewide to implement strategies designed to (1) increase the number of students making an application to a postsecondary education institution and (2) increase the number of seniors applying for and securing student financial aid, and (3) build a sustainable college-going community to support future students' college dreams.

College and Career Goal Arizona (C2GA) includes the Arizona College Application and College Goal FAFSA Campaigns, along with FAFSA Finish Line Reports. The College and Career Goal Arizona Campaign promotes equity by providing a supported, cohort approach where high school staff and peer support together, take on the role played in middle class families by an experienced, college knowledgeable adult. The role of this family member includes informing, motivating, and even prodding students toward submitting, on time, a college application. In order to participate in the Arizona College Application Campaign (CAC), high school principals and counselors sign a pledge to dedicate time and space, generally over 1-3 days, when every student is provided computer time to complete at least one application for postsecondary education. High schools also agree to a goal of 100% participation.

More than 1.2 million applications were filed in 50 states following this format last fall through the American College Application Campaign organized by ACT's Center for Equity in Learning. Arizona mounted a very successful seventh year campaign with 76 high schools representing over 24,000 seniors who participated in the 2019 CAC events.

College Goal FAFSA also provides cohort support for seniors to file the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). All high schools participating in the College Application Campaign were invited to join the College Goal FAFSA Campaign in 2019. One hundred and ten high schools chose to put on 187 workshops and 167 high schools signed up to receive FAFSA Finish Line Reports. Over the past 22 years, the Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education has coordinated the College Goal FAFSA program with the support and partnership of the Arizona Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (AASFAA). As the program has expanded, members of the Arizona College Access Network (AzCAN) have also volunteered hundreds of hours in support of this statewide effort. An additional challenge present for College Goal FAFSA is the application requirement of collecting parental income information and one parent's signature on each student's FAFSA application. Successful FAFSA completion must be a family affair.

Implementing College and Career Goal Arizona programs in Title I high schools statewide is expected to increase the number of Arizona seniors who complete a college application and successfully file the FAFSA, which will result in an increased college-going rate in participating high schools. Moreover, the environment in these high schools and their communities will develop into a persistent college-going culture, supporting postsecondary education options for all graduates into the future.

Goal 2: Provide support from knowledgeable professionals and accurate and timely information to help students and families take the steps to enroll, finance, and succeed in postsecondary education.

Strategy 2.1: Establish College and Career Goal Arizona to develop and support a college-going community within Arizona high schools and communities where every high school senior is encouraged and expected to apply and seek financial assistance to support a postsecondary education experience.

1. Promote the C2GA senior year initiative statewide.
2. Establish and develop relationships with key decision-makers and pertinent staff at Arizona postsecondary education institutions and high schools.
3. Encourage community “buy-in” via three groups: 1) ACPE Commissioners, 2) the College & Career Goal Arizona Advisory Committee, 3) and Achive60AZ Alliance Members.
4. Groups will assist in establishing partnerships and collaborations, identifying and securing funding, and recruiting volunteers.
5. Develop a Fundraising Partnership Plan inclusive of a case statement, goals, strategies, outcomes, and indicators for success.
6. Execute the College and Career Goal Arizona Fundraising Partnership plan.
7. Adjust activities and outcomes to meet the budget.

Performance Measures:

- Key leadership supports the statewide initiative.
- Funding, collaborations, and partnerships provide desired assistance in specific areas of need for FY 2021, FY 2022, FY 2023, FY2024, and FY 2025.
- Increase the number and proportion of Arizona high school graduates going on to college over a four-year period of time.
- Increase the number and proportion of college-going high schools and communities in Arizona.

Strategy 2.2: Coordinate the statewide *College Application Campaign*.

1. Secure external funding sources to implement program elements.
2. Develop marketing and public relations materials to invite high school administrators and counselors to participate in building a college-going community.
3. Identify and develop relevant web-based content rich materials for AzCAC website to support high schools, volunteers, and postsecondary institution personnel.
4. Mentor site coordinators via email, phone calls, digital resources and visits as needed.
5. Recruit high schools with a focus on Title 1 and rural.
6. Connect with non-profit volunteer organizations and college access organizations to share resources and collaborate.
7. Develop partnerships and collaborations with postsecondary institutions from all three sectors to ensure adequate support is provided for each of the participating high schools and staff.
8. Annually evaluate all aspects of the AzCAC program and make program changes accordingly.

Performance Measures:

- Program is adequately funded to support data analysis, high school giveaways, promotional materials, and evaluation.
- Increased number of high schools and seniors participating while retaining the focus on Title 1 and rural.
- Volunteer groups provide manpower for events at high schools.
- Postsecondary institution admissions and outreach professionals from all 3 sectors attend high school events and provide expert advice for program success.
- Media and newspaper coverage promotes AzCAC and touts the outcomes.
- Data on program success is gathered through evaluations from all stakeholders and analyzed for program improvements to be implemented.
- Promote program success at all levels.
- Participating high schools will be invited to participate as a College Goal FAF\$A high school.

- Increase the number and proportion of Arizona high school seniors who apply to a postsecondary education institution in the fall of their senior year.

Strategy 2.3: Coordinate the statewide *College Goal FAFSA* events.

1. Secure external funding sources to implement program elements.
2. Promote College Goal FAFSA events.
3. Curate and develop relevant, web-based, content rich materials which support the needs of high school personnel, volunteers, students, their families, as well as participating postsecondary institutions.
4. Coordinate and execute the on-going statewide College Goal FAFSA community events along with high school-based events to assist college-bound seniors, their families, and returning adults in filing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).
5. Mentor site coordinators via email, phone calls, digital resources and visits as needed.
6. In collaboration with the Arizona Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (AASFAA) and the Arizona College Access Network (AzCAN), recruit more than 260 professionals from all sectors of postsecondary education to participate in College Goal FAFSA events.
7. Provide webinar-based College Goal FAFSA volunteer training for community members, alumni, neighborhood organizations and local businesses interested in supporting the high schools in their community.
8. Host an online calendar and registration site where community volunteers and financial aid experts can sign up to assist at high school and community FAFSA completion workshops.
9. Evaluate and analyze data from survey responses of site coordinators, volunteers and workshop experts, as well as family/student participants, to make improvements.

Performance Measures:

- Programs are adequately funded to support high school giveaways, promotional materials, and program evaluation.
- Increased number of College Goal FAFSA events held and well attended over prior year.
- Financial aid professionals and members of AASFAA and AzCAN support the program with their expert advice at both community sites and high school events.

- College and Career Goal Arizona Student Exit Reports indicate target audience is served and benefits are realized.
- Increased number of FAFSA's completed at participating high schools and community sites over prior year.
- Track growth and usage of online registration tool for FAFSA completion events.
- Increased number of digital resources distributed, webinar registration and attendance, and unique website visits over prior year.

Strategy 2.4: Provide student level FAFSA Completion data in the form of FAFSA Finish Line reports to participating secondary schools, Local Education Agencies, and designated entities for the purpose of increasing student FAFSA completion.

1. Commission secures written agreements with high schools, Local Education Agencies (LEAs), and designated agencies, following the U.S. Department of Education requirements.
2. Commission requests state appropriation for annual technology, web portal, upkeep and maintenance, and 1 FTE to work with high schools to access, utilize, and analyze FAFSA Finish Line reports.
3. Professional development and web-based support materials are provided for counselors and advisors to understand data and how they can assist seniors.
4. A secure portal is established and maintained by the Commission enabling high schools, LEAs, and designated entities to upload requests for informational reports every week with the goal of providing targeted assistance to students an improving FAFSA completion
5. Statewide, district, and individual high school FAFSA completion rates are displayed in Arizona FAFSA Challenge dashboard.

Performance Measures:

- All contracted schools, LEAs, and designated entities receive both a manual and instruction about the use of the portal and reports.
- High schools act on information and specific knowledge to assist students to complete their FAFSA.
- High school personnel statewide become aware of the value of the

FAFSA Finish Line Completion reports and identify strategies to assist students in completion of individual FAFSA's.

- High schools and designated entities statewide see an increase in students FAFSA completions; thereby students obtain more funds for college attendance.
- Track the number of FAFSA Finish Line reports that are downloaded.

Strategy 2.5: Develop and promote the Arizona FAFSA Challenge among Arizona high schools in order to increase the FAFSA completion rate for the state and support a state-wide college-going initiative that will result in an educated workforce.

1. Secure funding for statewide marketing and promotion, website development, and on-going technology support.
2. Achieve a 52% FAFSA completion rate for the state gradually increasing the goal to 78% by year 2030.
3. High schools set a goal to increase their senior cohort FAFSA completion rate by at least 5% over the year prior.
4. Market and promote the AZ FAFSA completion dashboard and website statewide.
5. Encourage high schools to participate in AZ FAFSA challenges and promote friendly statewide competition through recognition for FAFSA completion rate growth and improvement.
6. Collaborate with partner organizations to promote the program and support the utilization of FAFSA completion data to improve statewide rates.

Performance Measures:

- Track the number of FAFSA Finish Line agreements signed in order to measure the increase in program participation from the prior year.
- Count the number of participants enrolled in formal AZ FAFSA trainings- evaluate post webinar trainings for effectiveness and content covered.
- Track the number of completed FAFSA's for each year as a percentage of the statewide senior cohort.
- Prepare a website traffic report for fafsachallenge.az.gov including the number of website visits, number of times forms and website content has been downloaded, pages viewed, time spent on individual web pages/content.

- Track social media activity promoting the AZ FAF\$A Challenge and engagement (followers, retweets, posts etc.).

Strategy 2.6: Provide current and relevant web, social media, and print-based information on college-going and financial assistance for families and students.

1. Secure external funding sources.
2. Develop content/program elements.
3. Identify outreach/distribution methods using partnerships and collaborations.
4. Implement, maintain, and evaluate the publications and websites including the *Arizona College and Career Guide* and ACPE websites: highered.az.gov, collegegoal.az.gov, azgrants.az.gov, az529.gov, and fafsachallenge.az.gov.
5. Implement, maintain, and evaluate social media activity and engagement of College and Career Goal Arizona and the Arizona Family College Savings (529) programs.

Performance Measures:

- Funds are adequate to support each project.
- Number of visits per website, numbers of publication requests
- Constituency feedback regarding value of communication and information.
- Staffing is adequate to plan, maintain, and evaluate a quality product.
- Track social media activity and engagement of College and Career Goal Arizona and the Arizona Family College Savings (529) programs (followers, retweets, posts etc.)

Strategic Issue 3: Private and public postsecondary education sectors can enhance student success and leverage resources by working together.

The postsecondary education system in Arizona comprises of three public universities, ten community college districts, and more than 94 private universities, colleges, and technical or vocational schools. The Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education has representation from these three sectors, two K-12 superintendents, and one individual from commerce and industry, all at the senior management level.

The composition of the Commission provides a unique opportunity for discussion, identification of problems and opportunities, and consideration of solutions from many perspectives. Commissioners benefit from the diverse perspectives among the group and gain a depth of knowledge about all sectors of postsecondary education. As described previously in this report, the Commission focuses its work in the areas of equity in postsecondary opportunity and efforts to assist in closing the gap in postsecondary education attainment for low-income and minority students. The Commission also seeks to strengthen relationships among all sectors of higher education, as well as encourage cooperation between all levels of education.

Goal 3: Provide a forum where all sectors of postsecondary education dialogue, partner, and problem solve issues of mutual interest.

Strategy 3.1: Use the ACPE meetings, statewide programs, and conferences both to problem solve and identify opportunities that cross sectors of postsecondary education

1. Hold productive meetings at least four times per year. Host a Developing Arizona's Human Capital conference every other year.
2. Use expertise of Commissioners and constituents to identify areas of opportunity and problems.
3. Use sub-committee or collaborative task force structures to achieve the identified goals.
4. Promote work of these groups to capitalize on opportunities and solve problems.
5. Executive Director and staff participate in collaborative efforts whenever possible and contribute to joint efforts for improvement.
6. Evaluate outcomes of meetings, conferences, and revise plan annually.

Performance Measures:

- Commissioners rate meetings as effective in achieving goals.
- Areas of opportunity and problems are identified through conversation and interaction.
- Collaborative work groups are established with Commissioner participation and leadership to achieve solutions or engage opportunities.
- Plans are revised and adapted to meet changing needs.

Strategy 3.2: Encourage, lead, and participate in collaboration/partnerships to promote college access and success.

1. Seek avenues to encourage collaboration/partnerships that contribute to the ACPE mission, such as College and Career Goal Arizona Advisory Committee and the Arizona Family College Savings Program Oversight Committee, and lead these groups in a manner that maximizes community input and buy-in.
2. Participate and contribute to collaborative initiatives such as the Arizona College Access Network, the Arizona Career Leadership Network, GEAR UP, Expect More Arizona, Achieve60AZ, and the Governor's Office of Education.
3. Review the effectiveness of existing initiative investments.
4. Share resources to assist in sustaining or initiating appropriate efforts.
5. Complete an annual review of these efforts and re-allocate personnel and resources as necessary.

Performance Measures:

- Number of collaboration/partnership investments.
- Assessment of contributions received and new contributors gained.
- Reallocation of resources based on evaluation.

Strategy 3.3: Initiate research through the Arizona Minority Education Policy Analysis Center (AMEPAC) that promotes equity and supports the closing of the achievement gap in order to accomplish the mission of ACPE.

1. Develop and support policy analysis center.
2. Use research to identify necessary initiatives and goals.
3. Identify research and infrastructure partners.
4. Disseminate and use research to promote policy change.

Performance Measures:

- Publish the Arizona Minority Student Progress report every two years to serve as a benchmark for progress and to analyze Arizona's success in closing the achievement gap over time.

- Take on issues or policy studies in between regular two-year schedule.
- Track the number of studies produced that forward opportunity and equity.
- ACPE staff sustain AMEPAC through leadership, infrastructure, and fundraising support.
- Research and its findings are promoted throughout the community.
- Document the impact of the studies.